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ABSTRACT

Recently, a number of quantitative studies have explored systematic relationships between sociocultural organization and patterns of language use, based on the assumption that speech behavior reflects the basic categories of the community's social structure. Such systematic links were arrived at by correlating average group scores for sociolinguistic variables with one or more non-linguistic variables. However, the fact that group practices may not reflect the behavior of individuals within the group brings into question the validity of the measurement. A study of phonological variation within a group of 33 Qatari male speakers is used to examine such discrepancies between aggregated figures and individual figures. It is suggested that variable rules are an attempt to account for variability within a group, but that much of the variation is still idealized. The system of analyzing variation may be improved, it is proposed, if the focus is shifted to the function of language use as a symbol of personal identity. While the sociolinguistic technique of comparing average group figures has been useful in illustrating the systematic nature of many unexplained linguistic phenomena, a technique is still needed to explain variation within each group. (MSE)

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THE UNREALITY OF QUANTITATIVE FIGURES

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In the past two decades a number of quantitative studies have succeeded in exploring the systematic relationships between the sociocultural organization and patterns of language use. The main assumption behind this approach has been the fact that speakers functioning as members of a particular group in a particular society have internalized the appropriate rules of speech usage, in addition to the rules of grammar, that are widely shared and used by other members of the group. In other words speech behaviour reflects the basic categories of social structure of the community. Therefore any full account of language behaviour should be integrated with other kinds of social behaviour and interaction (Lyons 1978).

Such systematic links were arrived at by correlating average group scores for sociolinguistic variables with one or more nonlinguistic variables. For example, Labov's original and pioneer study (1963) on the centralization in the first element of the diphthong (aw) in Martha's Vineyard revealed that the degree of the centralization is closely linked with the speaker's sense of identity with the values and norms of the local community vis-a-vis the norms and values of the mainland i.e. summer people. The correlation between socio-economic class and linguistic variables found in Labov (1966), Trudgill (1974), Wolfram (1969) to mention a few. Milroy (1980) showed a close relationship between the social network which the speaker is engaged in and the pattern of language use. Holes (1981), working on the Bahraini dialect, found an interesting correlation between speaker's sect and the realization of some variables. In these investigations social variables are regarded as independent and linguistic variables to be dependent. This approach has played an important role in revealing an extraordinary structure which otherwise would not have emerged. A classic example of this is the position of the post-vocalic (r) in New York City (Labov 1966).

Most of the quantitative studies, however, followed Labov's pioneer study in which he remarkably showed 'that variation and fuzziness are amenable to strict observation and statistical analysis' (Aitchison 1981: 53-4). Looking at it from a different angle we may say that these studies have reflected the social dialects in terms of the relative use of the same linguistic features which serve to characterize different groups of speakers.

Sociolinguists have come to accept the fact that the patterns revealed in these quantitative investigations reflect a desire on the part of each group of speakers to assert its separate identity distinct from other groups in the community. The findings of many of these studies have been accepted as interesting and sometimes as dogmas, without questions as to their validity and significance, although in the majority of these studies very much remains to be said about individual differences within each group. In fact some investigators completely ignore the role of individuals on the ground that the aim is to arrive at a neat pattern of group behaviour. For example Macaulay writes:

> 'the existence of difference among individuals in each population should not be allowed to obscure the extent to which this cultural

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identification, including its linguistic manifestations is a group phenomenon.' (1981:142)

Others have suggested that we must distinguish between group practices which typify groups of speakers and individual actions and behaviour. In other words, any member of the group may or may not conform to the pattern of the group (Downes 1984). This has been the line of approach, although we accept that every individual creates his unique system of behaviour, including speech, so as to resemble the group or groups which he wishes to be identified with (Milroy and Margrain 1978).

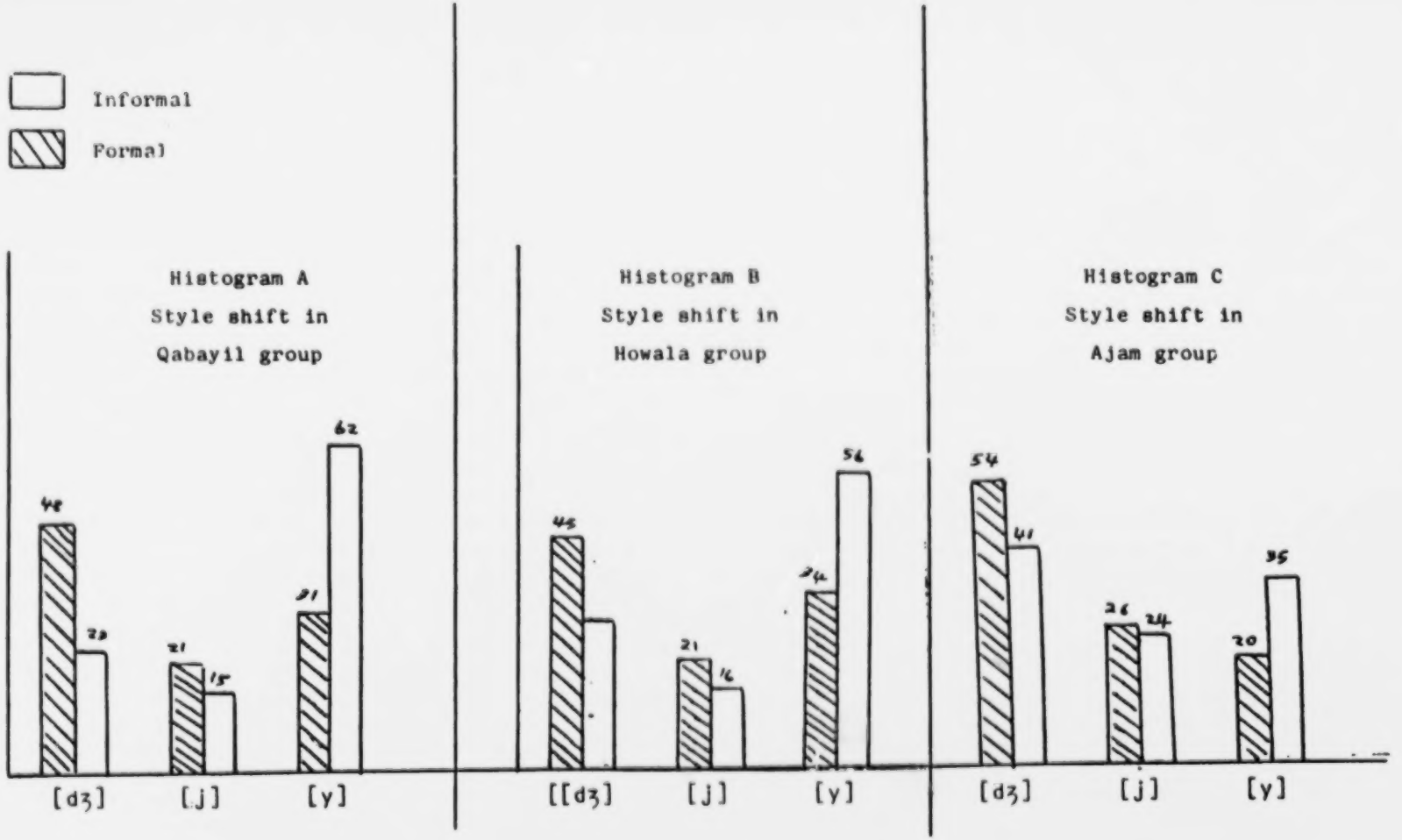
This raises an interesting and challenging question: if a group score or mean does not reflect the behaviour of individuals who constitute that group, then what does it reflect? If the aggregated figure of the group has reality in any sense, it must reflect the behaviour of the vast majority of its members. Thus looking at the aggregated figure of the group vis-à-vis the figures of the individual speakers may tell us a great deal about the significance of the group score. It may also reveal some aspects of the behaviour of the group in general.

The discrepancies between the aggregated figures and individual figures is the essence of this article. I will discuss the theoretical implication or implications for a situation where there is a sharp difference between the individual speech behaviour and the norm of the group behaviour as reflected in the aggregated figures; I will discuss the possible reasons that may lead to such differences and whether we can diminish such discrepancies or not within the existing approach of dealing with variation.

The data for this study come from 33 Qatari male speakers recorded in structural interviews. They represent three social groups namely, Qabayil (tribals), Howala (Returnees) and Ajam (Persians). Each group is represented by two age groups: old (above 50) and young (25-35); and the latter represents three educational groups: University graduates, secondary school graduates and primary school graduates. Formal and informal speech of each informant was recorded (for more details see Al-Amadidhi 1986, Chapter 2).

The linguistic variable under study is the voiced alveolar-palatal affricate (dʒ). In an earlier study (Al-Amadidhi, 1985) three variants were isolated for this variable namely [dʒ], (voiced alveolar - palatal affricate), [j] (voiced palatal fricative) and [y] (voiced palatal approximant). It was found that the [j] variant was constant across all the subgroups and did not carry any social value. In fact, people do not distinguish between [dʒ] and [j]. For them they are all cases of [dʒ]. The remaining variables carry social meanings. The [y] variant is the local pronunciation of the (dʒ) variable, whereas [dʒ] is the pronunciation of the superimposed variety i.e. Classical Arabic. Thus an increase in the [y] variant would entail a decrease in the realization of the [dʒ] variant and vice-versa. For these factors and to avoid complications, I will present here the figures for the [y] variant only when discussing the behaviour of individuals within each group.

The following histograms represent the realization of the [dʒ] variable in the speech of the three social groups in formal and informal styles.



Style shift in the three social groups

4

5

Table A

The style shift in the speech of members of Qabayil group

	Informant	Percentage of [ɣ] Variant		Degree of Shift	Group Shift Vs. Individual Shift
		Formal	Informal		
University Graduate (Young)	1	32%	77%	45%	+ 14
	2	6%	6%	Zero	- 31
	3	30%	67%	37%	+ 6
High School Graduate (Young)	4	12%	60%	48%	+ 17
	5	33%	20%	- 13%*	Opposite
	6	0%	58%	58%	+ 27
Primary Education	7	42%	78%	36%	+ 5
	8	37%	73%	36%	+ 5
Old	9	71%	80%	9%	- 22
	10	58%	77%	19%	- 12
	11	80%	89%	9%	- 22

Group shift average is 31%

Table B

The style shift in the speech of members of Howale group

	Informant	Percentage of [Y] Variant		Degree of Shift	Group Shift Vs. Individual Shift
		Formal	Informal		
University Graduate (young)	1	2%	31%	29%	+ 7
	2	21%	22%	1%	- 21
	3	8%	46%	38%	+ 16
High School Graduate (young)	4	35%	24%	- 11%	Opposite
	5	15%	64%	49%	+ 27
Primary Education (young)	6	16%	36%	20%	- 2
	7	9%	18%	9%	- 13
Old	8	70%	72%	2%	- 20
	9	74%	84%	- 10%	Opposite
	10	85%	91%	6%	16

Group shift average is 22%

increase of [Y] variant

Table C

The style shift in the speech of members of the Ajam group

	Informant	Percentage of [Y] Variant		Degree of Shift	Group Shift Vs. Individual Shift
		Formal	Informal		
University Graduate	1	1%	16%	15%	Zero
	2	3%	51%	48%	+ 33
	3	0%	7%	7%	- 8
Young	4	12%	5%	- 7%	Opposite
High School Graduate	5	34%	32%	2%	- 13
	6	0%	42%	42%	+ 27
	7	31%	33%	2%	- 13
Primary Education	8	14%	24%	10%	- 5
	9	25%	43%	18%	+ 3
	10	46%	65%	19%	+ 4
Old	11	28%	32%	4%	- 1
	12	61%	49%	*	Opposite

Group shift average is + 15

Looking at histograms a, b and c, we notice an increase in the standard variant [dʒ] as we move towards formal style. Simultaneously there is a considerable decrease in the realization of the localized variant [y] . These histograms reflect patterns of style shifting reported in most of the studies (Labov 1966, Macaulay 1976, Abdel-Jawad 1981, Shorrab 1981, Schmidt 1975 etc.). They support the findings of the majority of sociolinguistic studies, namely that the localized variant decreases as the context becomes more formal.

But the essential question is how far these patterns of style shifting are true of the members of each group? In other words, do all members of any group shift to the same degree as indicated by the histograms? Do they shift in the same direction? If the answer is positive, then it will be a great boost to the validity and significance of the patterns reflected in the histograms. We can be confident that group scores or the aggregated figures of the group have reality and do in fact reflect the behaviour of the members of the group. If, on the other hand, the answer is negative, serious consequences will follow as to the significance of these figures. To investigate this point, I will examine and compare the style shift in the speech of each individual within each group with the style shift of the group in general as reflected in the histograms. These are represented in Tables a, b and c.

Comparing the average score of the Ajam group (Histogram C) with the style shift in the twelve members of the group (Table C) many points are evident. Not all individuals shift to the same degree. The 15% shift as indicated in the histogram is an artefact of the system i.e. an aggregated figure. In fact, looking closely at the comparison, we realize that only a limited minority of individuals in the group shift in this way and to the same extent - (Speakers No. 1, 8, 9, 10). Some exhibit style shift to a much greater degree (Speakers No. 2, 6); some hardly show any (Speaker No. 7). Two speakers (Nos. 5, 12) unexpectedly shift in the opposite direction i.e. as the context becomes more formal, the realization of the localized variant [y] is increased. Similar discrepancies are also evident when we compare Histograms a) and b) with tables a. and b. respectively.

However, it is well-known that variation of this kind is influenced by various factors of which style is only one. These factors interact in a complicated manner to produce variations. Therefore it is quite possible that within the Ajam group, for example, those who display a different pattern of style shift belong to different sub-groups, i.e. educated vs uneducated or old vs young etc. Thus if we consider the speech of the individuals who form a homogeneous sub-group within this group in terms of various social factors such as university graduates, we may find that their speech and pattern of style shifting are quite similar and distinct from other sub-groups in the sample.

In Table C every three consecutive speakers form a homogeneous sub-group in terms of age, level of education, and of course tribe. Thus speakers 1, 2 and 3 are young with university level of education; speakers 4, 5 and 6 are young and high school graduates; speakers 7, 8 and 9 young with primary level of education; and finally speakers 10, 11 and 12 are old and illiterate.[1]

Taking the first sub-group (speakers 1, 2 and 3) the inconsistency in style shifting is evident. One shifts to a large degree (speaker 29 whereas another one just shows shift (speaker 3); speaker 1 shifts to the same degree (as indicated by the group pattern in Histogram C). They exhibit quite different realizations of the (dz) variable in the two styles although, theoretically, they should be similar for they are equal in terms of social variables. They are from the same ethnic group, same age group and all of them are university graduates. Once again the pattern of style shift as indicated by the aggregated figure i.e. the histogram, is no guide to the pattern of style shift of this sub-group nor to any other sub-group within the group. Similar discrepancies are also noticeable in other sub-groups. (Sharp cases are circled on the table.) The picture is very much the same when we compare the behaviour of each sub-group in the other two ethnic groups.

Some previous studies have explained certain cases of individual deviation. For instance Labov (1963) noticed an interesting case of one youth who became markedly more Vineyarder after he had returned to his homeland, having attended a college on the mainland. In fact he used the non-standard variant even more frequently than the most traditional local speakers. This was interpreted as a way of rejecting the values of the mainland by becoming one of the Islanders i.e. speaking in the same way.

But the charts and the histograms show that it is not a matter of one or two individual speakers deviating from the norm of the group. Rather, there is a considerable difference between the aggregated group figure and the behaviour of the majority of the individuals in the group. Therefore partial treatment of isolated cases is not enough. We must go much further and find some explanation for this type of constant discrepancy between the group figure and individual behaviour.

Generally speaking, the traditional Labovian approach has concentrated on the aggregated group figures to arrive at a regular pattern of variation in the community. It involves dividing informants into various groups. It is also understood that informants in any group such as young, female, working-class, represent a homogeneous group. But as a matter of fact they do not form such a group, for variation in individual competence-performance, along with variations in settings of interactions, and in characteristics of the participants, interact in various ways to produce a wide range of variation even in what is expected to be homogeneous group, as was indicated in the data presented earlier (Grimshaw 1981).

The traditional quantitative approach initiated by Labov regards people as static i.e. once they are part of a group, they are expected to behave in a certain way. For example, people are assigned to different socio-economic classes according to factors such as income, education, occupation etc., regardless of their sense of identity. That is to say, without considering the willingness on the part of the speaker(s) to be identified with X social class. For it is quite possible to have two speakers A and B who categorically belong to the same social group (X), yet their attitudes and sense of identity are different, i.e. A wishes to be identified with group X, whereas B considers himself to be part of group Y. Therefore their pattern of language use will change accordingly. They will adopt different verbal strategies and will respond differently to the norm enforcement mechanism of

the group to which they have been attached according to the static categories. In other words A who identifies himself with the group will respond positively to the norms of the group, whereas B who dissociates himself from the group will react in a negative manner and away from such norms. For 'each individual creates the system of his verbal behaviour so that he shall resemble those of the group or groups with which from time to time, he may wish to be identified.' (Le Page et al, 1974, 2). According to the theory of acts of identity, social categories such as sex, age, ethnic group, social class etc., will influence one's speech only to the extent that they represent social groups with which one wants to identify oneself (Hudson 1980). Therefore the more one is anxious to identify oneself with a particular group or to dissociate oneself from it, the more significant for one becomes the question of language as an indication of group loyalty or disaffection.

Such problems arise simply because we take social groups as the starting point of our investigation rather than the reverse i.e. taking individuals as the starting point and then looking for a social tag which unites the individuals with similar pattern of language use.

> 'There is no reason why single speaker output should be viewed as unstructured and unworthy of study. In fact, Bickerton, Le Page and Gumperz all take the individual as the basis of their descriptions of variation, principally because of the difficulty of defining corporate group boundaries.' (Milroy 1980, 133)

This leads to the other problem, namely that the quantitative approach regards social variables as discrete, although social notions are more like a continuum. When informants are divided into various socio-economic classes, for example, the implication is that each class is a separate entity. But in reality we find that within each class there is a great deal of nonuniformity when assigning informants to the group, i.e. some are truer representatives of the class than others; some will be at the peripheral zones of the group while others will be at the centre. All of these speakers will be regarded as equal parts of the same socio-economic class. Similar points may be made about other social variables.

It may appear that this point is irrelevant when we consider ethnic groups. For either a person is a member of the group or he is not. But even here the matter is not so simple, for there will be speakers who according to our criteria, such as colour, may be assigned to one particular group, yet their own sense of identity is at conflict with that of the group. In the end we have to say that it is not a question of whether one is or is not a member of a group on theoretical bases but rather one's willingness to be identified with the group or not, i.e. self-ascription is more relevant than the observer's allocation.

Another factor which may be responsible for the discrepancies noted earlier is the fact that most of the studies consider only a very limited number of social variables. For as we consider more of these variables we have two options either to increase the total number of informants in the study or to be content with a smaller number of informants in each cell. Generally speaking a limited number of these variables is considered in order to have a reasonable number of informants in each cell. But by adopting such strategies are we not overlooking the fact that human beings have versatile

abilities to identify themselves with unlimited numbers of groups in the society? Of course some groups are more prominent than others to the investigator which need not be the case for the informants. Each one of us responds to numerous external factors which cannot be systematically accounted for, otherwise the sample will be too large and will take a very long time to analyse. Even if we consider a large sample it doesn't guarantee that we have covered all the relevant social factors, simply because they are quite unlimited. In fact, in some of the more recent studies new factors, which were not considered in the previous studies, were found to be significant in explaining linguistic variation. L. Milroy (1980) in her study in Belfast reports that two female speakers were of similar age, socio-economic class and were living in the same area, yet their language showed consistent differences on many linguistic variables. This was due to the different network systems the two were engaged in.

A final factor could be the question of accommodation which has not been thoroughly investigated. We know that a proper conversation is an interactional process in which speakers are continually reassessing the social context and adjusting their speech to produce a speech which will reflect their attitudes (Cheshire 1982). In other words, in any verbal interaction a certain degree of accommodation takes place. Thus we change the pattern of our speech to be more like or more different from our interlocutors. Which strategy we adopt depends on our attitudes towards them. If we like them we tend to be more similar in the speech pattern we produce and vice versa (Giles and Smith 1979). Abdel Jawad (1981), in his study on the Jordanian Arabic, reports that better-educated villagers feel a need to switch from fairly localized non-standard linguistic code in relaxed circumstances to a more standard speech variety in the presence of their educational equivalents.

Another example of this process could be seen in Labov (1969) in which the child Leon who was almost speechless when interviewed on his own, showed rich verbal capacity when certain changes occurred in the context one of which was the presence of one of his friends. It is also equally true that different speakers show different levels of accommodation in the same context. There is no guarantee, in fact, why there should be any, that all informants in a designated group accommodate their speech in the same way or to the same degree. The impact of this factor remains to be investigated systematically.

Implications for Variable Rules

Variable Rules were developed as a modification of the optional rules found in Transformational Generative Grammar which regarded variation as an optional exercise and labelled it 'free variation'. Sociolinguists dealing with variation firmly believe that variability in primary data cannot be dismissed entirely as belonging to the realm of performance, but must, in one way or another, reflect what the speaker knows about his language without denying that some variability will inevitably occur as a result of idiosyncratic usages of the linguistic system. This has led to various attempts to incorporate variation into the grammar and to write rules that generate, at least, part of the observed variation. One such attempt was the idea of Variable Rules.

Variable Rules were first developed in connection with the contraction and deletion of the copula in Black English Vernacular (BEV) (Labov 1969a, 73b and c). The relative regularity of the contracted forms of is/are and the following phonological environment as well as the fact that the same phonological environments are at work for all the sub-groups, have led Labov to introduce the variable rules to replace optional rules in cases such as contraction of copula in BEV. Variable rules, however, are intended to replace most of the optional rules, particularly the ones which seem to be constrained by linguistic and non-linguistic elements. They are really a sociolinguistic attempt to state and incorporate sociological generalization in generative grammar. They indicate a set of more-or-less relations and can be seen as an extension of the orthodox optional rules. They state such rules in the form of a statement which introduces probabilities: rule X occurs at a certain frequency or freqencies according to the presence or absence of factors a,b,c... In fact we may say that variable rules do no more than summarize general trends found in groups and present them in statistical form (Wardhaugh 1986). They are also meant to reflect, in the apparently idiosyncratic usages of the individual speaker, indicators not of his individuality but of his group affiliation (Bell, 1976). This is reflected in the social constraints stated in the rules. I do not intend to repeat the criticisms launched at the notion of variable rule. But interested readers could refer to the following: Bickerton (1971), Bailey (1973), Macaulay (1976), (the acquisition of variable rules); Kay and McDaniel (1979), Romaine (1981), (departure from T.G.C. framework); Romaine (1980) (sound change and incompatibility with variable rules). However, in this part I will concentrate on the nature and viability of social constraints.

Variable rules are meant to be a part of 'community grammar' rather than a part of individual competence, otherwise speakers could not conceivably keep track of the frequencies of the linguistic variables in their speech relative to the realizations of the same variables in the speech of other members of the society. Thus some parts of the constraints are stated in terms of social categories such as socio-economic class, sex, age etc. These constraints are looked upon as having some reality. In other words, a change in one of these constraints would entail and imply a change in the frequency of a variant, i.e. application of the rule. These constraints also imply that speakers of the same social category would apply the rule to a similar extent. The degree of their application of the rule will be different from speakers from another social category. Let us see how far this is true of the data.

In the previous study (Al-Amadidhi 1985), the (dʒ) variable was found to be influenced by the following factors: tribe, age, level of education and the level of formality. Thus we may write the following tentative variable rule for the realization of (dʒ) in Qatari Arabic

$$(dʒ) \rightarrow \langle y \rangle \quad \begin{bmatrix} \text{tribe} \\ \text{age} \\ \text{education} \\ \text{formality} \end{bmatrix}$$

This rule reads that (dʒ) is variably realized as [y] according to the social factors mentioned in the rule. Thus we expect that speakers from the same

tribe, same age group and with similar level of education, speaking in the same context, to apply the rule, more or less, to the same degree. In other words, speakers who apply the rule to the same extent are expected to be of the same social group. Let us check this supposition against the actual figures in the data. The following table groups speakers according to their application of the rule in the informal style. The table shows quite clearly that the predictive value of the rule is true of none of the groups. All groups have speakers from diverse sub-groups. Group B, for instance, includes two old speakers from the Howala group, two old speakers from the Qabayil group and three young speakers from the latter tribe. They are of different educational levels, i.e. one is a university graduate while the other two have primary level of education. According to the rule this mixture should not occur. Speakers in their usage of the variable should be stratified according to factors such as the level of education. All other groups include speakers from different sub-groups as can be detected from the table. Now let us examine the data from a different angle. We shall look at the realization of the [y] variant in the informal style in the speech of university graduates in Qabayil group, which is theoretically supposed to be a homogeneous group. Here are the figures:

Speaker No.	Percentage of [y] in informal style
1	6%
2	67%
3	77%

Speaker No. 1 shows a very low percentage of the [y] variant in his speech in this style, while the other members of this sub-group have a relatively high proportion of the variant in the same context. In fact the pattern of speech of speaker No. 1 is more similar to speakers Nos. 1, 3 (Chart C) who are members of a different ethnic group but who are of the same age group and with similar level of education.

We have noticed that the predictive value of the social constraints is quite low. There are wide discrepancies between the speech pattern of an individual speaker and the pattern predicted by the rule. This is because people are different and even speakers of a very similar social background, even from the same family, may show different patterns of language use; and their abstract position in the social hierarchy in relation to the rest of the society would mean very little in terms of language use. It is true that the procedure of isolating the various social factors and correlating them with the linguistic variables had reflected social reality of the language use, to a certain extent and has helped to better understanding of the nature of variation observed in a large sample of speakers. But one must not lose sight of the fact that notions such as socio-economic class are abstract

Tabulating of speakers according to their application of the rule in informal style

	Speaker No.	Percentage of [Y]	Tribe	Age	Level of Education	
A	1	91	H	Old	-	89-100
	2	89	Q	Old	-	
	3	80	Q	Old	-	
	4	78	Q	Young	Primary	
	5	77	Q	Young	Univ. Grad.	
B	6	77	Q	Old	-	80-70
	7	74	H	Old	-	
	8	73	Q	Young	Primary	
	9	72	H	Old	-	
	10	67	Q	Young	Univ. Grad.	
	11	65	A	Old	-	
C	12	64	H	Young	High School	69-60
	13	60	Q	Young	High School	
	14	58	Q	Young	High School	
D	15	51	A	Young	Univ. Grad.	59-50
	16	49	A	Old	-	
	17	46	H	Young	Primary	
E	18	43	A	Young	Primary	49-40
	19	42	A	Young	High School	
	20	36	H	Young	Primary	
	21	33	A	Young	Primary	
F	22	32	A	Young	High School	39-30
	23	32	A	Old	-	
	24	31	H	Young	Univ. Grad.	
	25	24	A	Young	High School	
	26	24	A	Young	Primary	
G	27	22	H	Young	Univ. Grad.	29-20
	28	20	Q	Young	High School	
	29	18	H	Young	Primary	
H	30	16	A	Young	Univ. Grad.	19-10
	31	7	A	Young	Univ. Grad.	
I	32	6	Q	Young	Univ. Grad.	9-0
	33	5	A	Young	High School	

Q = Qabayil (Tribals)
H = Howala (Returnees)
A = Ajam (Persians)

entities. In fact, 'membership of a group labelled "lower class" does not necessarily form an important part of person's definition of social identity'. (Milroy 1980, 14).

It may be said that variable rules were proposed as a part of community grammar. Therefore, it needn't be true of all members of the community. Then what is the point of having a rule without knowing the proportion of speakers to whom it would apply. This would also raise the question of the learnability of this kind of rule and that variable rules are too powerful, i.e. they are not falsifiable, and therefore have no predictive power (Romaine 1981).

The notion of variable rules is an attempt to account for the variability found in the data. But a great deal of this variation, for instance variation within each group, is still very much idealized. Bearing in mind that the Chomskyan approach in dealing with variation was rejected as an idealized system, <u>are we not</u> doing just the same thing but on a smaller scale? Within the former approach variation was abstracted out in order to get at the essential properties of the language system; in the latter, i.e. Labovian approach, individual differences within each group are ignored to arrive at a neat pattern of language use across various groups. But many cracks could be noticed in this neat pattern once we examine closely the behaviour of members of a particular group or sub-group. For variable rules are a mathematical formalization of the quantitative relations discovered in the aggregated data.

<u>Conclusion</u>

We must realize that the individual speaker lives in a multi-dimensional set of relationships to the various groups within his community. Therefore he is subject to all sorts of conflicting pressures derived from the social symbolism of different variants. His idiolect not only reflects his unique position in relation to the purely structural heterogeneity of the language system, but also his particular relationship to the normative pressure exerted by the different groups or sub-groups in the society (Downes, 1984).

The system of analysing variation may be improved if we concentrate on the function of language use as a symbol of personal identity, which is proposed by Le Page and many social psychologists. Le Page, for instance, tries to explain the linguistic behaviour of individuals by examining the nature of the social and psychological space within which they live. He says:

> 'in order to do sociolinguistics properly - that is, in order to understand social and concomitant linguistic processes (controlling) acts of identity - we must go deeper than either Marx or Labov and discover those basic human and social needs which motivate all forms of individual and social behaviour and the mediating role of language.'
> (Le Page 1979: 176)

I am not advocating that sociolinguistic studies adopting the technique of comparing the average group figures are, in any way, invalid. On the contrary, it was through this method that a great deal of unexplained linguistic phenomena were shown to be systematic. But nontheless, it is equally true that we have not yet developed a technique to deal with and

explain the variation that occurs within each group. The individual linguistic behaviour is influenced by so many different elements and isolating a few of them will not give full insight into such a complex process. Perhaps that is why social constraints on the variable rule do not control the variable in the way they are supposed to.

1. Classification according to the level of education for the old group was not possible, as formal education in Qatar started 1951.

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